

MINUTES  
**CALIFORNIA BIODIVERSITY COUNCIL**

June 7, 1996  
Miners Foundry  
325 Springs Street  
Nevada City, California

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT**

Michael Mantell, Resources Agency  
Maria Rea, US Environmental Protection Agency  
Mietek Kolipinski, National Park Service  
Nita Vail, Department of Food and Agriculture  
Mike Shulters, US Geological Survey  
Colonel Lyn Creswell, Marine Corps  
Robert Meacher, Regional Council of Rural County Supervisors Associations  
Bob Haussler, California Energy Commission  
Jerry Harmon, San Diego Council of Governments  
Hershel Read, Natural Resource Conservation Service  
Nancy Huffman, Northern California County Supervisors Association  
W.R. RegGomes, University of California  
Ed Hastey, Bureau of Land Management  
Richard Wilson, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection  
Chauncey Poston, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts  
Laurence BudLaurent, South Central Coast Regional Association of County Supervisors  
Susan Cochrane, Department of Fish and Game  
G. Lynn Sprague, U.S. Forest Service  
Dale Hoffman-Floerke, Department of Water Resources  
Pat Meehan, Department of Conservation  
Ray Nutting, Sacramento Mother Lode Regional Association of County Supervisors  
Rick Rayburn, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Bill Maze, San Joaquin Valley Regional Association of County Supervisors  
Pat Foulk, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Frank Michny, Bureau of Reclamation

**CALL TO ORDER**

Michael Mantell called the meeting to order and introduced two new members. Ray Nutting will represent the Sacramento Mother Lode Association of County Supervisors and Reg Gomes, Vice President for the University of California Natural Resources and Agricultural Program, will represent the University of California. Dr. Gomes offered his commitment to finding ways to better integrate the needs of biodiversity and natural resources and agriculture.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE MARCH 28, 1996 MEETING**

The minutes were approved as submitted.

## **REPORT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

John Amodio, Chairman of the Executive Committee, reported on the status of the actions taken during the last quarter on the Council's Strategic Plan. One of the new efforts is the Local Group Needs Assessment, lead by Janet Fairbanks. Staff is currently in the process of meeting with local government representatives, private land owners, and others in the Monterey area to determine if there is interest in a follow-up workshop to the March 1996 Council meeting.

The planning team for the Science Coordinating Committee has been meeting to develop a proposal for the Council's consideration. Anne Kinsinger and Susan Cochran are co-chairing this activity. The Science Coordinating Committee will facilitate data sharing and the joint development of new information that would support the conservation of biological resources.

The Education and Outreach Committee is chaired by Chris Chrystal. This committee is assembling a media information kit and an education information kit on biodiversity.

## **COUNCIL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Status of the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project**

Jeff Romm, U.C. Berkeley, reported the completion of the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project report. Dr. Romm reviewed the preprinting problems associated with presenting the report to the U.S. Congress. The preprinting included an executive summary (45 pages); volume I (200 pages), which is an overall view of the whole project; volume II (1,400 pages); and volume III (1,200 pages). The full report will not be available for the public until late June or early July, but will be available in a number of places. Dr. Romm expects the SNEP report to be on-line and available over CERES in the next couple of weeks.

### **Status of the EIS for the California Owl and Fuels Management Projects by the U.S. Forest Service.**

Lynn Sprague, U.S. Forest Service, reported the official title is "California Spotted Owl EIS". It has evolved into a wider ecosystem perspective for the ten national forests in the Sierras dealing not only with spotted owl, but other wildlife species. Also included will be strategies on fuels, fuel loading, fire risks in the Sierras, and a riparian and aquatic conservation strategy for managing the water system and the head waters of the Sierra.

Mr. Sprague reported that about 100 projects have been recently completed in national forests in California to reduce fire hazard and improve ecosystem function.

### **Reinvestment in Watershed Health**

Robert Meacher, RCRC representative and a County Supervisor in Plumas County, gave a brief update on the efforts in his area to reinvest in watershed health. The state is undergoing a process of determining how to provide water for the future and improve the Delta at the same time. The entire state needs to be considered when looking at the water future for the State of California. The local counties that produce the water for the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project do not have the financial resources to complete needed

watershed improvements. The rural counties in the region are coming together to address this problem and to promote reinvestment in the watersheds where the water originates.

### **Cooperative Planning MOU for Mono County**

Ed Hastey, Bureau of Land Management, provided a brief update on MOU between the BLM, Forest Service, and Mono County. In June of 1995, Mono County passed a resolution that called for a formal collaborative planning process to establish a link with the state, federal, and county folks in Mono County. An MOU is now in place to accomplish that work.

County Supervisor Andrea Lawrence was present to give a few comments. We need to work in a collaborative and coordinated fashion with all public land agencies in Inyo and Mono counties. If people are going to live, work, and play in our area, they need to work with us in the county and get involved.

### **Fire: A Force Shaping Natural Resource Management and Human Development in the North-Central Sierra Nevada**

Chauncey Poston, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, Nevada City, gave introductory remarks. Understanding the dynamics of watersheds is incumbent upon us. Fire is only one of the tools available for fuels management. Properly used and planned, controlled burning can treat vast areas of multiple ownership lands. The use of fire requires intensive planning and cooperation by stakeholders and specialists. Without cooperation, our watersheds will continue to deteriorate. Without cooperation, the threat of catastrophic fire will continue to increase. There is a need to find ways to use fire for a mutual benefit.

Richard Wilson, Director of the California Department of Forestry, explained that fire goes where it wants to on its terms. All our technology and manpower cannot stop fire if the conditions are right. Large fires are not stopped with equipment and manpower. They are controlled by weather and land conditions. Education of the public is essential in order for them to become more actively involved along with the professionals and experts.

A wildfire protection zone puts a barrier or buffer between valuable resources and heavy fuels. Properly placed buffers can prevent heavy losses. The state has the expertise and can provide assistance, but we need the help of local cooperators. Building on these efforts over a ten-year period will make a significant impact on the wildfire protection zone.

The Fire Strategies Committee determined the importance of cooperation and recognized the need to identify barriers in getting a prevention program in place. One barrier is air quality. Exploring the different ways of doing business before agreeing to prescribed burning is the Air Quality Control Board's preference. Mechanical manipulation of the vegetation is one way, but it's costly. Biomass, was once seen as a great opportunity, but does not appear to be economically feasible for comprehensive use. The question is "is biomass a viable alternative in managing fuels because of its high costs?" It does have benefits to the landscape and the management of fuels. If air quality is a problem, then a mechanical system makes sense. Ethanol is a potential product from biomass that holds some promise.

We also have a problem of liability with insurance. The Committee is trying to develop hands-on community-type projects. Prevention can cut losses and costs so that in the long run, we will have a healthier landscape.

## **Overview of the June 6 Forum**

Robert Roan, High Sierra Resource Conservation and Development District, commented on the local forum held the previous day. The forum started with an overview of the North Central Sierra Nevada region. This was followed by a series of presentations on actions at the state, regional, and watershed level to address concerns about wildlife and forest health in the Sierra Nevada Region. A panel discussion on community actions for protecting the environment then concluded the forum. The panel addressed community planning actions; land owner responsibilities; the role of the real estate and insurance industries; and educational programs. The forum was very well attended. He also acknowledged the help of Judy Tartaglia, Tahoe National Forest, in organizing the forum, along with a number of other local organizations.

He also suggested that the Council revisit the recommendations made in the earlier Sierra Summit Report. He pointed out that this report makes only one mention of catastrophic wildfire. Since that report was released, we have suffered through several major catastrophic fires. Growth issues, past logging practices, and fire suppression efforts have created an expensive situation for the citizens of California and the nation.

## **Secretary of Agriculture Honor Award**

Lynn Sprague, U.S. Forest Service, recognized Rusty Whitmoore of the Tahoe National Forest. Whitmoore was recently given the Secretary of Agriculture's Honor Award for his leadership of the Tahoe Hotshot Crew during the 1994 season.

## **Restoring Natural Fire Regimes to the Sierra Nevada**

Wayne Harrison, Calaveras District, California Department of Parks and Recreation, addressed the natural role of fire in the Sierras. He focused on the state park lands and suggested that old growth forests are threatened by a change in the fire regime. Fire is an essential process that cannot be completely replicated by mechanical means or timber harvest.

Geologically, floristically, and climatologically, the past 10,000 to 12,000 years have been stable enough for us to assume that the ecosystem of the Sierra Nevada have had more variations on a theme than radical departures. A constant feature of this theme has been some periodic and relatively frequent exposure to fire. Because of the frequency, the build up of forest fuels between fires was reduced and fire intensities were typically low, punctuated by occasional and local hot spots.

The Department of Parks and Recreation is making a strong effort to restore the natural fire regime. Fire suppression, especially highly organized and mechanized fire suppression, is a recent phenomenon in the landscape of the Sierra Nevada evolved and maintained by fire. Studies of fires in California over the past several decades clearly indicate a reduction in the overall number of fires and a decrease in the average size of fires. However, there have been a

significant increase in the number of high intensity, stand replacing fires. This is the new fire regime.

Slides were shown dating back a hundred years showing comparisons of various parks and forests. Some federal, state, and private forest managers began utilizing prescribed burning as an important means of restoring the natural fire regime. The initial objective of these burns was fuel reduction with the hope that the first burn would remove enough of the fuel build up to protect the forest from unintentional and unmanaged wildfires. Subsequent burns would then carry out the task of ecosystem restoration.

It is time to argue for a well-planned, well-regulated mechanical treatment of forests in state parks. Biomass operations subsidized by a single entry harvest of selected trees, followed by a prescribed burn, could result in a major and immediate improvement in the restoration of the forest ecosystem in park lands. There are too many trees, many of which are dying due to overcrowding. There is too much fuel and too big a threat of catastrophic fires. We must advance the restoration of the Sierra Nevada natural fire regime directly and quickly, even if it means running counter to the traditional views of land stewardship. The threat will not wait for a more benign approach.

We are faced with some restrictive conditions in counties that declare burn and no burn dates. Some districts are looking at establishing minimum or maximum of pollutants that can be injected into the atmosphere on any given day. If fuels can be reduced mechanically, fire intensity will be reduced. Fires will be easier to conduct, there will be less char and scorch and emissions.

Timber management agencies need to be encouraged. Private corporations should expand prescribed burning and ecologically-based harvest practices. The biomass industry is an important resource that was available to us and is now greatly restricted and needs to be revised. The public is willing to accept prescribed burning because they understand the alternatives. Education on the importance of prescribed burning as the region's population increases should be emphasized.

### **Examples of Projects Linking Fuels Management with Economic Development**

Betty Riley described projects by the Sierra Economic Development District. The mission of Sierra Economic Development is to alleviate unemployment and underemployment while protecting the quality of life in the foothill region. Government does not create employment. The private sector creates jobs. Before private enterprise is willing to invest in a project, there are three requirements: (1) create enough revenue, (2) sustain a revenue over time, and (3) no government process delays.

The Sierra Economic Development District is conducting a biomass utilization study to look at three things: (1) resource, (2) potential value added ways of using the material, and (3) encourage the investment of private enterprise in the region that will ultimately lead to jobs and higher-end job creation.

Biomass is the production of electricity through cogeneration. Other possible uses are ethanol production, composting, mulching, and small tree uses in lumber post and polls. Identification of new uses, new industry, and the potential is very real. The report is still in draft form and will be released in the next two or three weeks. An alternative use for dead and dying small trees being taken from the forest is needed or there will be a solid waste problem.

The Sierra Economic Development District has also been working with the Yuba Watershed Institute in obtaining another small grant to support a local initiative to look at the sustainable development of a timber frame construction marketing cooperative.

John Sheehan, Plumas Corporation, reviewed the four areas where Plumas County is focusing--concept, map, money, and recent developments. In terms of concept, the community came together at the local level to develop a method that would be sustainable over the long term dealing with watersheds, sustainable forestry, and fire. The map indicates fuels breaks and thinnings in the broader forest areas. These would be constructed in elongated strips that would follow the roads and border the 5,000 acre watersheds.

The Quincy Library Group went to Washington in February of 1994 to convince Congress and the administration on the value of their landscape management proposal. Although generally successful; they were unable to secure adequate funding to complete the proposal. Other financial alternatives are being explored for watershed improvements and thinnings. Users at the end of the pipeline should be made to pay a greater share of producing high-quality water. The Plumas Corporation is working on strategies for accomplishing this goal.

The Plumas Corporation has been working on the shirt tails of Betty Riley and the Quincy Library Group in entering into a joint venture with the National Renewal Energy Lab of Golden Colorado. This would include a feasibility study on biomass to ethanol manufacturing plants in Northeastern California. The California Energy Commission, Department of Food and Agriculture, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Air Resources Board have indicated a desire to be partners in this project. This project will begin this month, and the feasibility report should be done this year.

### **How Should We Use Our Understanding of Fire in Future Planning for Natural Resources and Human Development?**

Robert Harris, USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, south Lake Tahoe, Supervisor, was the moderator for this panel. It is important to remember that woodlands are much more than a benign backdrop. They are a living, growing, changing ecosystem. By virtue of moving into the woods, we have become part of that system. Forest ecologists explained that a healthy forest is not choked with brush and crowded with trees struggling for sustenance. With wildfires, the necessary balance is restored.

Ray Nutting, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, Placerville, talked about the Tahoe Basin and some of the planning strategies on the west slope. He reported the Tahoe Regreen Program is actively involved in reducing the fuel loads. Strategies are being included that were not an option in 1992. Property owners can cut dead vegetation, and the Resources Agency is working with CDF and the USDA Forest Service. A funding source is needed to facilitate expanding the effort to cover more acreage.

El Dorado County has adopted a new general plan that is committed to economic diversity, fire hazard reduction, defensible space, development limitations, and adequate fire protection. New regulations deal with new development. Rural residents feel that policies to regulate fuel management or to impose new fuel management programs can be an infringement of their rights.

Groups are beginning to come together to build consensus. The logger still has a place

in the woods. There is a need to get back to healthy forests, to reintroduce fire, and to be able to fund it. That will not happen in rural California unless the 5,000,000 people—environmentalists and timber, cattle, and business interests build a coalition. The watershed is important to the whole system.

### **A Perspective from Local Land Owners**

Rich Gresham, Placer County Resource Conservation District, noted that the Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) can work with individual landowners. The RCDs are concerned that county planners interpret conservation as recreation. Only recently have they considered the relationship between a healthy forest and fuel load reduction in their public participation forums. They very rarely identify what agencies can do for them, because they don't know what agencies can do for them.

Agencies need to get together, take a look at their tools, use those same tools to work on a larger scale, either the watershed or the community plan level. We need the Council's help to coordinate and implement our goals and policies.

### **A Perspective from an Environmental Organization**

Linda Blum, Sierra Alliance, Quincy, stressed the need for protection and maintenance of biodiversity. She defined biodiversity as the **A**wealth and variety of living organisms and their interactions, but also includes ecological processes carried out by those organisms interacting with the non-living aspects of the environment. **@**Fire is an element of biodiversity by definition because it is a natural process. It is an ecological process. It is probably the most significant missing element in our ecosystem because of fire suppression. Ms. Blum strongly urged the Council to engage in some critical thinking about the ecological role of fire, management of fire and fuels, and how they respond when fire does occur.

One of the long-standing justifications for timber management activities is that logging is a mechanical means to mimic the effects of fire as a process. Logging can mimic the effects of fire on the gross physical structure of the forest ecosystem. However, logging requires the construction of roads, and roads have tremendous impacts on individual watersheds. Roads tend to collect water, intercept subsurface flows and make them surface flows. Sometimes the road diverts surface flows from one small drainage into the next one, making this one dryer and the other one have higher peak flows. Fire doesn't build roads. Fire doesn't compact the soils. Fire doesn't spread forest pathogens like root rot diseases and other forest pests.

Fire tends to leave the large material and the large structures and removes the smaller material. The opposite is true of logging. Fire also tends to purify the soil. Fire goes down into the root columns, under the soil. Those were the places where the forest pathogens, the root rot diseases, were in the first place. Fire then very slowly burns all that out and is nature's control system for the kinds of things that make our forests weak, susceptible to drought, susceptible to bugs, etc. We should be considering mechanized treatments for the removal of

the biomass, thinning from below. We also need to think about going one step further and putting fire back on the ground and in the forest, and doing so at the appropriate times of year.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Tracy Grubbs, Associate Director of the Sierra Business Council, gave a quick overview of their new publication "The Sierra Wealth Index@ The Business Council is a new association of businesses in the Sierra Nevada that is concerned with the long-term economic and environmental health of the region. They cover a ten county region in the Sierra.

Dr. Sandy Ross, President of Health and Habitat and Field Associate at the California Academy of Sciences, urged Council members to do their burns at the natural time of year. Dr. Ross requested that most of the burns be done as close as possible to the natural time, but it also has to be where there is a natural fuel break or using a lot of foam to make sure that the fire doesn't jump the line. Dr. Ross believes that the human caused fuel management should be conservative and should also be staggered.

Tim Duane, University of California-Berkeley, briefly explained a handout adapted from his chapter in the SNEP report (116 pages). He explained if there was a lower population forecast and development patterns were modified, it would take about 8 percent more land area to accommodate the population growth. If, on the other hand, there was a high population forecast and the current pattern continues, it will take 293 percent more land area.

Louis Blumberg, The Nature Conservancy, advised the Council that his organization, after four long years and a lot of hard work, produced a letter to Congress urging increased funding for fuels management projects in the west. The letter has strong bipartisan support, including 31 members from the California delegation--17 Democrats and 14 Republicans spanning the state from the Oregon border to San Diego. During the past week, the House Appropriation Subcommittee approved an increase from \$3,000,000 to \$9,000,000 for the USDA Forest Service to augment fuels treatment programs on the national forests in California.

Bernard Carlson, El Dorado County, encouraged the Council to continue to find ways to support and help local government and landowners.

## **Special Award**

Julie Lydick, Howard Carlson, and Dave Connell, from the Tahoe National Forest, presented a plaque to Jeff Finn, California Department of Fish and Game, who was pivotal in helping to organize a coordinated planning program for prescribed fires and other fuels treatment in the North Yuba watershed. Mr. Finn successfully brought public agencies within Nevada County together with citizens groups and locals on San Juan Ridge.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.